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RUEHQU/AMCONSUL QUEBEC 0604  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 002031

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/20/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [HA](#)  
SUBJECT: MINUSTAH/HNP ATTACKED IN CITE SOLEIL

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR JANET A. SANDERSON, REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary. A MINUSTAH operation to clear rubble from an area near a Cite Soleil checkpoint on October 19 generated fierce protests from local residents. The operation ultimately resulted in an armed battle between Cite Soleil gang members and HNP/MINUSTAH forces. Attackers firing three to four automatic weapons pinned down a contingent of roughly 20 Brazilian soldiers and engineers plus a seven-member HNP SWAT team for one hour before a MINUSTAH relief force arrived to chase off the attackers, according to a U.S. police advisor accompanying the SWAT unit. Medecins Sans Frontier (MSF) reported that it received five casualties from the conflict, all local residents: one person dead on arrival and four persons injured. MSF could not specify whether the casualties had participated in the fight. MINUSTAH officials appear to have undertaken the rubble-clearing operation without consulting with the community, and at least one resident reportedly claimed that what MINUSTAH regarded as disused rubble was her dwelling. The incident highlights the fragile rapport between Cite Soleil residents and MINUSTAH forces and the tenuous involvement of Haitian police (HNP) so far in the effort to pacify Cite Soleil residents. End Summary.

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THE FIGHT

12. (C) Robert Cook, an American UNPOL SWAT advisor at the scene, gave the following account of the incident to poloff: On the morning of October 19, his team of seven SWAT team members (five HNP and two UNPOL) accompanied a patrol of 16-17 Brazilian peacekeepers in Cite Soleil to provide security for engineers who were razing buildings adjacent to Checkpoint #16, a MINUSTAH base containing approximately 200 soldiers in the Boston area of Cite Soleil. The purpose of the demolition was to provide MINUSTAH troops at the checkpoint with a better defensive position. After the bulldozing began, an angry crowd began to build, some of whom began throwing rocks, according to press reports. Approximately 15 minutes later the peacekeepers came under fire from three or four semi-automatic weapons (which Cook said sounded like AK-47s) from roughly 100 yards away. The peacekeepers took cover, returned fire, and radioed for

assistance. The attackers pinned down the peacekeepers for an hour, during which time the gunfire periodically swelled and lulled, until a contingent of Brazilian and Peruvian troops arrived in armored personnel carriers (APCs) armed with heavy machine guns. As soon as the rescuing troops began to envelop the attackers, positions, the attackers fled.

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THE AFTERMATH  
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¶3. (U) MSF informed Poloff on October 23 that they had treated four Haitians suffering from gunshot wounds and confirmed one death resulting from the fight. A Reuters news report on October 20 cited witnesses claiming MINUSTAH peacekeepers had killed three people during the incident. Cook reported that he observed no "bodies, hits, or blood trails," and MINUSTAH announced on October 20 that they were unable to confirm any casualties.

¶4. (C) Though MINUSTAH military leaders claimed privately that they had consulted with community leaders before undertaking the October 19 operation, MINUSTAH political staff relayed to Polcouns that the military leadership had not laid the necessary groundwork. The political staff believed that military had made an understandable mistake, treating what appeared to be abandoned and partially collapsed housing as rubble to be cleared away. In the context of Cite Soleil, however, residents regard any standing structure as having some value, and residents would expect at the very least to be paid if MINUSTAH destroyed a dwelling. Recognizing their error, MINUSTAH political staff reported that engineers planned to reconstruct the structures they had bulldozed during their operation.

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HNP ROLE  
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¶5. (C) MINUSTAH and GoH leaders report that President Preval insisted that the HNP take part in efforts to establish order in Cite Soleil. As a result, MINUSTAH began including HNP SWAT and crowd control (CIMO) units in its patrols at the beginning of October. Cook explained that the official role of his SWAT team is to "observe and advise," during patrols, but that it has no operational or command responsibility. In fact, the SWAT unit lacks the firepower and protection necessary to engage the well-armed gangs. Typically, a seven-member SWAT team, carried in an old and bullet-riddled armored SUV accompanies a convoy of five or six heavily armed and armored APCs in a morning patrol through the streets of Cite Soleil. Cook stated that the SWAT team is the most vulnerable and lightly-armed segment of the patrol, carrying only handguns and riding in a vehicle (which he said resembles a "cheese grater") with "questionable" ability to resist rifle fire. On occasion, the patrols will stop, the soldiers in the APCs will exit, and the convoy will assume a defensive position while troops check out a building for weapons or search for a wanted gang member. Cook could remember only one other instance since SWAT joined the patrols that the officers come under fire when they received a few "pot shots."

¶6. (C) COMMENT. This incident highlights the fragility of the GoH/MINUSTAH effort to establish stability within Cite Soleil. Though gang leaders have supposedly committed to the disarmament process, they evidently remain willing and able to attack MINUSTAH troops. Despite significant progress by MINUSTAH in gaining the confidence of Cite Soleil residents, miscalculations in dealing with the community can still lead to bitter conflict. Finally, with no immediate prospect for the reopening of police stations and establishing a normal HNP presence in Cite Soleil, the integration of HNP forces into the GoH/MINUSTAH security plan for Cite Soleil remains

mostly symbolic. We hope that MINUSTAH can minimize the negative impact of this incident on their overall efforts through a swift damage control effort with community leaders and a practical "lessons learned" exercise.

SANDERSON